



SOCIOL 650: Methods of Sociological Research

Spring 2017

Tuesdays 7-9:45 pm

Professor: **Sofya Aptekar**
sofya.aptekar@umb.edu
Office Hours: by appointment
Wheatley Hall 04-007

Course Description and Goals

Whether one is in the position of producing or consuming academic research, polls, policy research, program evaluations, or even journalism, a detailed understanding of research methodology is critical. In an extremely diverse field such as sociology, an understanding of methodology is one of a few crosscutting and fundamental dimensions of our discipline. This is especially the case in applied sociological research. While we will pay special attention to applied approaches in this course, you will also get a broad introduction to research techniques in this class and SOCIOL 651. Even if you end up never using a particular approach yourself, this breadth is important, as you may need the ability to weigh and evaluate the reliability of findings reached through a wide variety of approaches.

In this course I hope to provide you with the methodological tools to both explore research questions of interest to you and to confidently evaluate the work of others. Specifically, this will involve a substantial amount of reading, participation in a group project, pursuing individual assignments in an area of interest to you, participation in both individual and group presentations, doing computer-based exercises, and the preparation of a final proposal. We will have several guests, mostly drawn from faculty in the sociology department, who will provide you with an invaluable opportunity to ask methodological questions of a variety of researchers, as well as to get a behind-the-scenes perspective on research. Ideally, these activities will introduce you to a variety of specific methods so that you can choose those most appropriate to a specific research question.

We will discuss the origins of different research methods, as well as their historical and contemporary contexts of power. This syllabus outlines the first semester of a two-semester sequence in research methods in our Sociology programs. The second semester (Soc. 651) focuses on quantitative data analysis (statistics).

Required texts, readings, and software

Kristin Luker. 2010. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut*. Harvard University Press. (available in the campus bookstore and through Healey library as an ebook). All additional articles and readings will be available on the course Blackboard page.

SPSS: You can access SPSS through UMB's Virtual Computer Lab or by going to the actual computer lab. The Sociology Department owns a copy as well.

AtlasTi: A limited number of licenses were distributed to some of you. Others can use virtual or IRL computer labs, or download a free trial <http://atlasti.com/free-trial-version/>.

Quizzes: Two in-class closed book quizzes early in the semester will help you retain key concepts necessary to construct a research plan and evaluate the research of others.

Group research project: In this course you are expected to participate in the class project, which is a disparity study of the construction industry in Springfield, Massachusetts. We will discuss the specific nature of your participation in this evolving project during our first class and beyond. You will be graded on your contribution to the group project, as well as sharing the final grade for the report.

Individual project: In addition, there will be several individual assignments and a final proposal related to a set of research questions in an issue area of your choosing. There is no final exam in this class.

- 1) **Presentation of research question** 5-7 minute presentation of your research question, followed by group discussion. You can use the board, make a handout, or make 1-2 PowerPoint slides. February 14.
- 2) **Draft literature review** that includes: (1) a “daisy”, (2) an annual review article, (2) relevant encyclopedia or dictionary entry, (3) a table of searches like in Luker’s Appendix 4, (4) list of at least 5 key books and articles identified. Due on Monday, February 20, at 8pm. Submit on Blackboard.
- 3) **Revised literature review + research question 2.0** incorporating feedback from class and professor. You need to propose two or three research questions (within the same area of interest), describe how your questions relate to existing literature, and why your questions are interesting and important. This assignment should be 2-3 pages long. Follow Luker’s guidelines. I also recommend looking at chapters 3 & 4 of *The Craft of Research 3rd Edition* (Booth et al. 2008) available online in the Healey library Ebrary catalog. Due Tuesday, February 28 in class and on Blackboard.
- 4) **Survey research/Available data mini-proposal** For this assignment you need to outline a survey research design that could be used to explore a specific research question or set of research questions within your issue area. Please describe in detail the types of questions that will be asked, your sampling strategy, whether or not you will conduct follow-ups (and why), and how you plan to analyze the results. Please discuss why this is a good approach given your research question(s) and any imagined advantages/challenges. You can also outline research using secondary data. Find an existing dataset relevant to your questions (questions may have to be altered to accommodate existing data sources.) Describe the dataset (location, time period, size, cross sectional, longitudinal), the manner in which the data was collected, and how you would use the data to address your research questions (describe which variables would be your dependent, independent, controls, etc.). This assignment should be 2-3 pages. Due April 4 in class and on Blackboard.
- 5) **Revised lit review and questions 3.0.** Literature review and project planning are iterative processes. You must demonstrate how your research plan is evolving as you continue to do literature review and learn more about methods. Due April 18 in class and on Blackboard.
- 6) **Qualitative mini-proposal.** For this assignment you need to outline a qualitative research

design that could be used to explore your research questions. Be sure to explain how the research design is well suited to your specific research question. Also, discuss the advantages of your proposed approach and any potential challenges. This assignment should be 2-3 pages. Due May 9 in class and on Blackboard.

- 7) Final Paper proposal.** This proposal will introduce your research questions, provide a brief review of the literature relevant to these questions, and then present the (now hopefully refined) research strategies you described in assignments throughout the semester. Describe at least two research approaches. Be sure to discuss how your various research designs are tailored to address the specific research questions. In the closing section, discuss the strengths and weakness of the various approaches and the potential contributions (both social and academic) of such research. This assignment should be 10-15 pages and ideally will be a resource in other courses, or for your MA paper or dissertation. Due May 19 on Blackboard.

SPSS and AtlasTi Assignments:

I will assign exercises that will require you to use the statistical package SPSS. These assignments will help you gain familiarity with this commonly used statistical package. This is a skill that will be a huge benefit to you in Soc 651 (where you will consistently use SPSS), and possibly helpful for your MA paper, dissertation, and beyond. We will practice analyzing a dataset of people killed by police in the last two years.

I will also assign several exercises using a qualitative software, AtlasTi. These exercises are meant to familiarize you both with AtlasTi, which is used by many qualitative researchers, as well as introduce to the process of coding and qualitative data analysis. We will practice analyzing media articles about deported adoptees.

Extra Credit: For 3 extra points added to your final grade, attend a session of the Social Theory Forum (March 24-25, 2017). Write a 2-page memo summarizing and reflecting on the methodological approaches used by the presenters. Include name of session, presenters, and topics. One extra credit per semester. Deadline April 1. Submit by email.

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation: To get the most out of the class and contribute fairly to the group project as well as to class discussions, you are expected to attend every class meeting. If you are not able to come to class, please inform me before class via email.

If you missed a class, do not email me saying "What did I miss?" Find the answer to this question from the syllabus and your classmates. Please read all assigned readings, bring them with you to class, and be prepared with questions and reflections, particularly when it comes to readings written by our guests.

Note: I may change the syllabus and assignments as necessary to adjust to the needs to the class. The level of work will stay the same or decrease. You are responsible for all changes and information presented in the course, regardless of whether you attended class.

Communication: Check your UMass Boston email regularly, preferably daily, for updates from the instructor. I will respond to your communications with me in a prompt manner, and expect that you

do the same. Please observe professional decorum when emailing (e.g. include a salutation and a signature). If you have a lengthy question or concern, it is probably best to meet with me and explain in person.

Please see the **Code of Student Conduct** for discussion of classroom decorum, academic dishonesty and plagiarism http://www.umb.edu/student_affairs/code.html

Incompletes: I will not give a grade of INC (incomplete) except in extraordinary circumstances. Receiving an INC in this introductory course will hinder your progress toward your degree and rarely leads to a better final grade. Graduate School policies on incompletes can be found at: http://www.umb.edu/academics/graduate/documents/Graduate_Bulletin_06-08.pdf.

Tips for academic integrity: (1) you have rights and responsibilities regarding your work; (2) always acknowledge your sources; (3) never falsify information; (4) do your own work; (5) recognize your limitations; and (6) be proud of your work. The bottom line is this: words copied from another source must be so indicated (with quotation marks or indenting) and such sources, as well as any from which you have paraphrased or drawn significant evidence, must be fully and precisely identified. Please don't hesitate to consult with me should you feel in need of any clarification.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offers guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from UMass Boston's **Ross Center for Disability Services** <http://www.rosscenter.umb.edu/> 617-287-7430. If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center and provide me with the necessary information and corresponding paperwork.

Expectations of Students

- 1) I expect that you will give me and your colleagues your complete attention when you are in the course. This means that despite the unfortunately late hour of the course, you will not sleep, read material unrelated to the course, use your phone, check email, surf the web, or eat in a disruptive manner. We will break during class to allow for bathroom breaks and more involved eating. Please silence your phone upon entering class.
- 2) Expect critical but constructive feedback from both me and from your classmates. Give critical feedback with a spirit of helpfulness. It is important for civil discourse to govern our classroom interactions as a reflection of professional ethics and the diversity each of you brings to the course. Be aware of your level of participation as a constructive member of the group, not simply as an individual.
- 3) When another student is speaking, give that student your undivided attention.
- 4) Come to class on time. Do not leave early. Do not start packing up before the class is finished. If you need to be late or leave early, please tell me before class.
- 5) I want to know how things are going for you in the course. If something is not working, or you have questions, make an appointment to meet with me.

Expectations of Instructor

- 1) I will be organized and prepared for every class meeting.
- 2) I will be attentive to your concerns and try my hardest to make the course material interesting, accessible, and relevant to your overall work as a graduate student.
- 3) I will grade fairly and promptly. Your grade will be based on your performance and not any personal consideration (such as race, gender, class, religion, or whether or not you and I agree or disagree about a particular issue).

- 4) When you are speaking during class or when we meet in my office, I will do my very best to give undivided attention.
- 5) As a matter of keeping the classroom a conducive learning environment for each of you and in respecting the kind of resources that you are giving to be here, I will not tolerate inattention or lack of respect or incivility directed towards me or towards other students.
- 6) I know you have other commitments besides this course. I will begin and end class on time.

Grades

Assignment	My grade	Percent of final grade
Research Question Presentation		2
Draft Lit Review		2
Lit Review 2.0		2
Lit Review 3.0		3
Mini-proposal #1		4
Mini-proposal #2		4
Final Paper Proposal		27
Final Class Project Report		22
Group Project Participation		10
Participation/Attendance		10
SPSS/NVivo Assignments		8
Quiz 1		3
Quiz 2		3
Extra Credit		3
Total		103

94-103 = A 90-93 = A- 87-89 = B+ 84-86 = B 80-83 = B- 77-79 = C+ 74-76 = C
 70-73 = C- Below 70 = F

Course Schedule

Week 1 January 24	<u>Introductions, expectations, goals, and logistics</u>
Week 2	<u>Introduction to Social Research and using SPSS</u>

January 31 *Class will meet in Mac A lab	Read: Luker's Ch. 1 and 2 Watch: Intro to SPSS tutorials and video Do exercise in Ch. 2 – bring to class
Week 3 February 7	<u>Research questions and disparity study</u> Guest: Susan Moir, Labor Resource Center Mini-lecture: <i>Explanations in Social Science</i> Read: Albelda 2009 Disparity Study proposal <i>Pathways to Equity</i> report SPSS assignment #1 – due in class
Week 4 February 14	<u>Research design 1: Measurement, validity, reliability</u> Read: Luker Ch. 3 and 4 Schutt, Ch. 4 p. 125-141 Do exercises in Ch. 3 and 4. Create a 5 min presentation about your research question. SPSS assignment #2 – due in class
Week 5 February 21	<u>Research design 2: Bias, logics of inquiry</u> Listen: Deborah Carr podcast Read: Luker, Ch. 5 Small, “How Many Cases Do I Need?” Explore: Library resources on blackboard Draft lit review - hand in on Blackboard by Monday night at 8pm.
Week 6 February 28 QUIZ 1	<u>Research design 3. Sampling</u> Read: Luker Ch. 6 – do the exercise (29pp) Maxfield, Ch. 8 Do exercise in Ch. 6 and bring to class to share Hand in revised lit review
Week 7 March 7	<u>Research design 4: Feminist Methods</u> Read: Luker, Ch. 7

	<p>Gray et al, Ch. 10 (23 pp.)</p> <p>Go through all the steps on p. 136 and write down your answers – bring to class to discuss</p> <p>SPSS assignment #3</p>
SPRING BREAK	
<p>Week 8</p> <p>March 21</p> <p>QUIZ 2</p>	<p><u>Surveys</u></p> <p>Listen: Justin Pickett podcast</p> <p>Read: Singleton and Strait, Ch. 15</p> <p>Re-read: p. 28-29 in Luker</p> <p>SPSS assignment #4</p>
<p>Week 9</p> <p>March 28</p>	<p><u>Available data</u></p> <p>Guest: Keith Bentele</p> <p>Listen: Mathew Hughey's podcast</p> <p>Read: Singleton and Strait, Ch. 12</p> <p>Bentele and O'Brien, "Jim Crow 2.0?"</p> <p>Bring written-down questions for Dr. Bentele</p> <p>SPSS assignment #5</p>
<p>Week 10</p> <p>April 4</p> <p>Meet in TAB Lab</p>	<p><u>Qualitative overview and Atlas Ti training</u></p> <p>Listen: Francesca Poletta podcast</p> <p>Read: Luker, Ch. 8, 10</p> <p>Watch: AtlasTi video tutorial</p> <p>Survey research mini-proposal due in class</p>
<p>Week 11</p> <p>April 11</p>	<p><u>Focus Groups</u></p> <p>Listen: Audrey Kobayashi podcast</p> <p>Read: Morgan, "Focus Groups"</p> <p>Devant and Ravn "Drug Risk Perceptions"</p> <p>AtlasTi assignment #1</p>

	(Continue to work on your literature review)
Week 12 April 18	<p><u>Interviews</u></p> <p>Guest: Sarah Mayorga-Gallo</p> <p>Read: Mayorga-Gallo, Ch. 3</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Lamont and Swidler “Methodological Pluralism”</p> <p>AtlasTi assignment #2</p> <p>Bring written-down questions for Dr. Mayorga-Gallo</p> <p>Hand in the latest version of your lit review and question</p>
Week 13 April 25	<p><u>Experiments and Audits</u></p> <p>Listen: Devah Pager podcast</p> <p>Skim: Pager “Mark of a Criminal Record”</p> <p>Read: Cherry and Bendick, “Making It Count”</p> <p>AtlasTi assignment #3</p>
Week 14 May 2	<p><u>Ethnography</u></p> <p>Guest: Leslie Wang</p> <p>Listen: CJ Pascoe podcast</p> <p>Read: Wang, TBA</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Marvasti “Ethnography”</p> <p>Bring written-down questions for Dr. Wang</p>
Week 15 May 9	<p><u>Evaluation, community-based research, participatory action</u></p> <p>Guest: Andrea Leverentz</p> <p>Read: Leverentz and Williams, “Contextualizing community crime”</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Singleton and Strait, Ch. 14</p> <p>Bring written-down questions for Dr. Leverentz</p> <p>Qualitative mini-proposal due in class</p>
May 19	FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE